Creo en la Familia

Like learning the Spanish language, you can only understand the mechanics of the *familia* after being immersed in the Spanish culture. During my time living abroad with a host family, I developed a new understanding of the state of affairs in a household that works. I believe in order for family to work it needs three important elements: a madre, the daily *comida*, and the alliance.

The madre is the pillar of a good Spanish family. The home is her domain and the family is her business. To my generation, who grew up in the 1990’s post-feminist years, this type of woman is something we have only heard of in stories that began with the phase, “back in my day…” The word “housewife” is practically a four letter word. Young women become pilots, lawyers, and doctors, not housewives. But like societies need good doctors, they also need good mothers. As the core of the family, the *madre* forgoes individual motives and finds fulfillment in her role in the family whereby she contributes to the greater society.

The *comida* is the blood which keeps the bonds within the *familia* invigorated. Around 2pm each day as I strolled home after Spanish class, the usually busy streets were empty and every shop was closed. Every Spaniard young, old, professional, or student was sitting around a table with their family eating the *comida.* At my table in the cramped kitchen sat my *padres*, their three grown daughters, and the grandchildren. I watched the bond within my *familia* and pondered my own family back in the US. How had we become so distant? Preoccupied with our individual lives, in the US we rarely sit down with our love ones. After being in Spain, I realized that sharing a daily meal cultivates the most basic connection required for people to understand one another.

The family connection intensifies through an alliance of devotion. My madre’s youngest daughter, Imma, reminded me of my own sister. Both girls struggled with college and had trouble balancing their checkbooks. My parents took punitive actions to “handle” my sister’s shortfalls. To the contrary, my *padres* accepted Imma’s qualities and never outgrow their constructive role as her parents. With her parents as her allies, Imma graduated college, her father helped her established a business, and she took on motherhood through invitro with the aid of her mother. The collaboration of family elevated Imma to fulfilled her greater life goals. Within the *familia* there is an unspoken pact of alliance which enhances each member’s individual reality.

After growing up in a culture so focused on the individual, this type of family was refreshing to witness. In the USA, we glorify the individual. Parents encourage children to leave home at eighteen. Universities separate siblings. Husbands leave wives and retirement homes isolate grandparents. I believe that in the US we have exchanged the personal pursuits of independence for the fulfillment of family relations. In Spain being part of a family is a personal investment which not only enriches the individual but also builds a vibrant society.